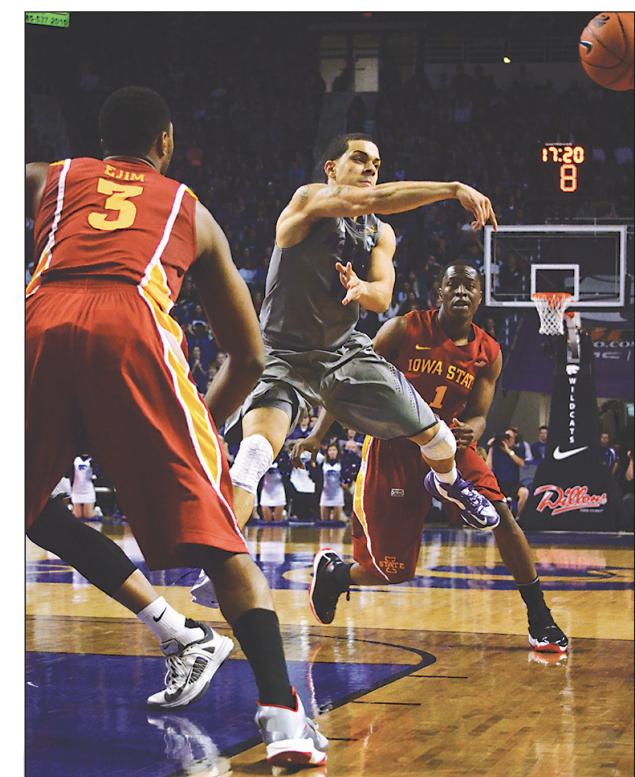


Silencing the critics: Cats look to win in tourney



Parker Robb | Collegian
Sophomore guard Angel Rodriguez passes the ball to a teammate during the Wildcats' 79-70 victory against Iowa State on Feb. 9 in Bramlage Coliseum. Rodriguez scored 20 points with two blocks and three assists and finished the season second in the conference in assists, with 6.2, and third with a 2.5 assist-to-turnover ratio.



Jacob Dean Wilson | Collegian
Senior guard Martavious Irving goes for a layup over Texas Tech junior forward Kader Tapsoa during the Wildcats' 75-75 win over the visiting Red Raiders on Feb. 25 in Bramlage Coliseum.

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PLAYERS | Smith leads nation in shooting

Continued from page T3

4. Taylor Smith, power forward, Stephen F. Austin

If you are looking for a guy that is going to finish at the rim, look no further than Mr. Smith of the Lumberjacks. Smith leads the country in shooting with an incredible 69.8 percent of his shots. While he is a short power forward at 6 feet 6 inches, he was still able to average 14.1 points on 52.5 percent from the field against major conference teams Texas A&M and Oklahoma.

What Smith lacks in size, he makes up for with heart as he is an extremely hard worker that will not allow himself to be

denied.

At 26-3, the Lumberjacks have been on a roll, winning 21 of their final 23 regular season games en route to the NCAA tournament. They will not wow you with big-time scoring numbers, but are great on the defensive end. In the NCAA tournament the play slows down, which may just play into the hands of Stephen F. Austin.

While there are more players that have the capability of taking over in March, these are the teams to think about when filling out your bracket.

Mark Kern is a senior in journalism. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.

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the collegian

INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

VOL. 118 NO. 114



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TIPOFF

NCAA Tournament Guide

Wildcats have opportunity to go far in NCAA tournament

Nick Carroll
contributing writer

In a season where it seemed like a court was being stormed every week, no upset seems impossible. With the absence of a clear-cut favorite, the No. 11 K-State Wildcats have proven that they can go into the tournament with high expectations of finishing at the top.

The Wildcats have built up their resume all year long with key wins against Florida and everyone in the Big 12 besides Kansas. What is more important than the Wildcats' key wins are their key losses. In a season many have deemed "the year of the upset," K-State is the only team in the top 25 that has not lost a game it was favored in.

This year's NCAA tournament has a different ring to it. While in years past, powerhouse teams such as Kentucky, North Carolina and Connecticut have been the favorites going into the tournament, this year's pool is wide open. With five schools and everyone fighting for a shot to be a No. 2 seed, the tournament is missing that surefire favorite.

Any team looking to rise to the top would need discipline, the ability to share the ball, great coaching, a balanced team and a leader with pro potential. Lucky for K-State fans, that describes this Wildcat team.

The Wildcats are very well disciplined on the offensive side of the ball. They lead the Big 12 Conference with only 12 turnovers per game. Not only are they disciplined, but they also play a hard-nosed defense.

When it comes to sharing the ball, K-State is a well-oiled machine. The Wildcats average 16.5 assists per game, placing them at the top of the Big 12 and 11th in the country. With that type of ball movement and unselfish play, combined with the offensive weapons the Wildcats possess, the sky is the limit for this team.

Wildcat fans have had the pleasure of watching a star shine brighter and brighter for the last four years. Senior guard Rodney McGruder came to Manhattan as a highly-touted four-star recruit. He has developed into one of the best players to ever play purple.

As a first team All-Big 12 selection, McGruder has been the epitome of a leader for this K-State team.

Bobby Knight, former Texas Tech coach, famously said when asked what it takes to win a champion-

ship "To be as good as it can be, a team has to buy into what you as the coach are doing. They have to feel you're a part of them and they're a part of you."

If this is the case, then it is safe to say K-State players have bought into coach Bruce Weber's new motion offense system. As a first year coach, Weber led the Wildcats to their first conference title since 1977 and a 25-6 record.

The K-State Wildcats have just as much of a chance as any to rise up and win a national championship. This "year of the upset" seems to have passed this team by. Unranked teams have upset top five teams 18 times in the 2012-13 season, none of which have affected the Wildcats. With so many question marks across the country, the only question that K-State needs to ask themselves is "Why not us?" March is here everybody, and it's going to be a fun ride.

Nick Carroll is a sophomore in journalism and mass communications. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.

Editor's Note: This article was completed as an assignment for a class in the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications.



Parker Robb | Collegian
Senior guard Rodney McGruder sails past Iowa State defender Melvin Ejim to put up a shot on Feb. 9 in Bramlage Coliseum. The Wildcats avenged their earlier loss to the Cyclones in Ames in the 79-70 victory, with McGruder leading the team with 22 points.

Which Cinderella team will the shoe fit?



Junior Juvonte Reddic pulls up for a jump shot against George Washington on Feb. 16 in Richmond, Va. Reddic is second on the team in points per game, with 14.5, and first in rebounds per game, with 8.2.



Mark Kern

What makes the NCAA tournament so great is when the underdogs are able to pull off upsets. Teams like George Mason from 2006 and Virginia Commonwealth in 2010, teams that no one expected to do damage, went all the way to the Final Four.

The types of upsets happen every single year and as all the top teams in the country have flaws, you can count on these upsets this year. Here is a look at a handful of the teams to be weary of when filling out your bracket.

1. VCU

As mentioned above, the Rams of VCU behind coach Shaka Smart have crashed the party once before, and are looking to do it again.

Junior power forward Juvonte Reddic is the leader of the Rams, averaging 14.5 points and 8.2 rebounds, while a playing a crucial role to the defense. VCU's calling card.

VCU averages 11.9 steals per game, over one steal a game, more than the next closest team, Louisville. With a frenetic pace, picking up teams the full 94-feet, the Rams make it extremely difficult for other teams to set up an offense.

Not only does VCU do a great job of forcing turnovers, they also capitalize on these turnovers, ranking 11th in the country at 78.1 points per game.

The Rams finished second place in the Atlantic 10, a game behind conference champion St. Louis.

That said, the Rams are a team that nobody wants to see on their bracket, and with their defense, they have the talent to make another deep run in the tournament.

2. San Diego State Aztecs

When you are trying to make a run in the NCAA tournament, a veteran group definitely goes a long way in helping the team.

Leading the Aztecs is Jamahl Franklin, a 6-foot-5-inch guard. Franklin does a terrific job of getting to the rim, where he finishes as well as anybody in the country.

The Shockers have been close in the NCAA tournament the past couple of seasons. Last year they lost a heartbreaker to VCU in the first round.

This year, Wichita State is led by seniors Carl Hall Jr. and Malcolm Armstead, who average 12.8 and 10.4 points, respectively.

In the Missouri Valley Conference championship game, Armstead scored a season-high 28 points to nearly single-handedly bring the Shockers back against the Creighton Bluejays.

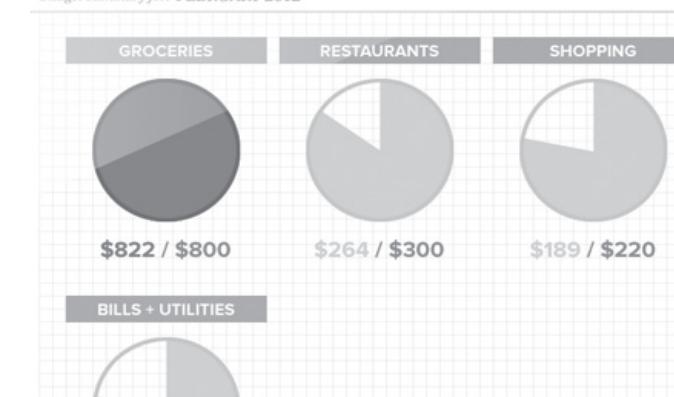
The experience that these two provide give Wichita State an advantage, having been through many tough games. Add the revenge factor to make up for last season's disappointing ending, and you have the makings of a scary team come next week.

Mark Kern is a senior in print journalism. Please send comments to spkern@kstatecollegian.com.

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Kansas at top of NCAA tournament upset alert list



Sophomore point guard Trey Burke attacks the paint on November 21, 2012, in a 67-62 victory against Pittsburgh in New York. Burke was recently announced the Big 10 Player of the Year and will be key if the Wolverines are going to avoid the upset bug.

John Zetmeir
staff writer

There are nearly 10 teams still battling for the chance to get a No. 1 or No. 2 seed for the NCAA tournament, teams full of stars, teams with great coaches and teams who have taken care of business all season. This is why it's called March Madness. Which of the top teams will most likely be going home earlier than expected?

If Shepard can have a big-time March and play to his potential, the Aztecs are a team that are capable of making it to the second weekend.

3. Wichita State Shockers

The state of Kansas has been as good as any state this season when it comes to college basketball, with the Shockers from Wichita State ready to make some noise in the NCAA tournament.

The Shockers have been close in the NCAA tournament the past couple of seasons. Last year they lost a heartbreaker to VCU in the first round.

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season, the Jayhawks were expected to win the Big 12 Conference championship, but after losing four games, Kansas shared the title with the No. 11 K-State Wildcats.

All four of Kansas' Big 12 losses came against teams that were not ranked at the time of the game, which included the biggest upset of the year when Kansas lost to TCU. It seemed that the Jayhawks had their heads on straight after their three-game losing streak before losing their last game of the season. Kansas went into the Baylor game knowing that a win

would mean the Big 12 title outright, and then lost by 23 points.

Factor in three Big 12 wins they needed to get the job done, and anyone can see that this Jayhawk team is not the same as in past years. Despite having multiple veterans from last year's team that went to the national title game, this Kansas team relies on a freshman to take on a majority of the scoring load. This team will only go as far as Ben McLemore takes them.

Leading the list is the No. 7 Kansas Jayhawks, a team infamous for being upset in the NCAA tournament. This

season, which led to winning the Atlantic Coast Conference regular season title. The Hurricanes were undefeated in ACC play before losing three of their last five games of the season in what was a weak conference this season. Two of those three losses were to teams that finished with only six conference wins.

Miami's only other two losses this season were to two good mid-major teams in Florida Gulf Coast and Indiana State. If the Hurricanes get a top two seed, they will most likely get matched up with another good

mid-major team which could pull Miami on upset alert. The Hurricanes have not been to the NCAA Tournament since the 2007-08 season. Despite having a talented squad, Miami lacks players who have been there before.

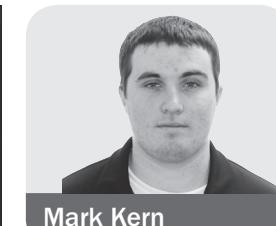
Lastly, there is a tie between the No. 2 Indiana Hoosiers and the No. 6 Michigan Wolverines. All season, everyone has heard about how these are two of the best teams in the country and how they each could be considered a favorite to win it all. This all means one thing that every team will give these two teams

their best.

All five of the Hoosiers' losses could be considered upsets, but they did defeat the Wolverines both times by a combined 9 points. With Wooden Award finalists on the team in Victor Oladipo and Cody Zeller for Indiana and Trey Burke for Michigan, both teams have star power.

With no certain No. 1 team in the country this year, there is room for plenty of upsets to take place. With mid-majors becoming as strong as ever, no team can be overlooked anymore.

4 players that could become household names during the tournament



Mark Kern

Every year in the NCAA tournament, players that you have never heard of become fan favorites with their special March performances. This season, there are guys capable of both grabbing the nation's attention and leading their teams to a deep run in March. Here is a look at a few of the under-the-radar guys capable of putting their team on their backs.

1. Nate Wolters, point guard, South Dakota State

While he had a good game last year in the Jackrabbits' near upset over the No. 3 seed Baylor Bears, Wolters has taken his game to another level this season. He has turned into an all-around player, averaging 22.7 points to go along with 5.8 assists and 5.6 rebounds. Never has he been as good as he was on Feb. 7, as he poured in 53 points in an 80-74 overtime

victory over IPFW. At 6 feet 4 inches, Wolters has great size for a point guard and has the ability to dominate a game in more than one facet.

Wolters is surrounded by four other upper-classman starters that are capable of creating some noise in the NCAA tournament. If you are looking for a point guard that is capable of taking over, Wolters is definitely a guy to keep an eye on.

2. Lamont Jones, point guard, Iona

If the name Lamont Jones doesn't ring a bell, maybe the nickname "Momo" will. Two seasons ago, Jones was the starting point guard of the Arizona Wildcats, a team that went to the Elite Eight. He averaged just under 10 points a game for a team that featured former No. 2 pick in the NBA draft Derrick Williams. When Jones transferred schools, his talents went with him, as he now leads the Gaels with 23 points a game.

The biggest strength in Jones' game is his will and fearlessness, two things that you need to be successful in the NCAA tournament. With his past experience in the tournament, Jones will not back down from the challenge.

Last season, Jones blew a 25-point lead over BYU in the play-in game, something that continues to haunt Jones and his teammates. Look for the Gaels to be tough in the NCAA

tournament this season.

3. Mike Muscala, power forward, Bucknell

While Wolters and Jones are guards, here is a big guy for the fans that love a great interior player.

Muscala averages a double-double, scoring 19 points while pulling down 11.2 rebounds on the season.

He has shown the ability to step up in his team's biggest games. Against Missouri on Jan. 5, Muscala had 25 points and 14 rebounds as the Bison nearly pulled off the upset in Columbia.

While Muscala has the ability to score on the block, he also has a solid touch from the outside.

15-18 feet out, making him extremely difficult to stop on the offensive end. But as good as he is on offense, he is also a big-time presence on the defensive end, where he averages 2.5 blocks per game, which ranks 27th in the country.

Bucknell has had a history of great players in the NCAA tournament, most notably against Bill Self and the Kansas Jayhawks on March 18, 2005. However, they have not had a player of this caliber until now, and Muscala is going to be a load down low for anybody that has to match up against him.

While Muscala has the ability to score on the block, he also has a solid touch from the outside.

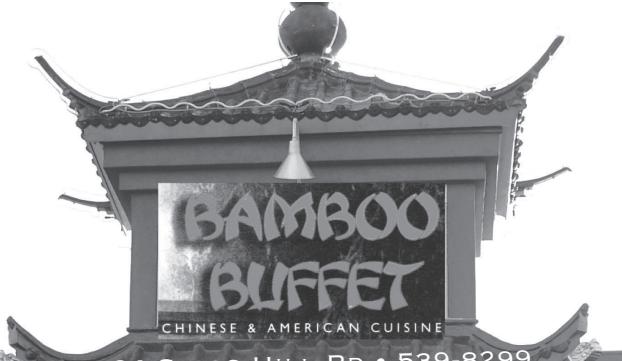
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PLAYERS | pg. T4

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